

# PHILOSOPHICAL ROMANTICISM

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# INTRODUCTION

## Re-inheriting romanticism

*Nikolas Kompridis*

### **What is philosophical romanticism? Why now?**

One does not have to be particularly attentive to notice that a good deal of what goes on in philosophy these days cannot be neatly categorized either as “analytic” or as “continental.” Thanks especially to the path-breaking work of Charles Taylor, Richard Rorty, Stanley Cavell, Hubert Dreyfus, Robert Pippin and others, all the crossing and recrossing in recent years between Anglo-American and European philosophical traditions has opened up a depoliticized philosophical space between “analytic” and “continental” philosophy. As a result questions and issues are being approached from a much wider and much more illuminating range of perspectives. And this makes possible previously unthinkable conversations across considerable historical, cultural, and philosophical distance.

For many of us it is a welcome sign that the categories “analytic” and “continental” have lost some of their ideological power to shape philosophical outlooks. While they still play an institutional role as *political* categories, as *philosophical* categories they are becoming increasingly irrelevant. That doesn’t mean, however, that they are going to disappear anytime soon as an unstoppable wave of toleration and cooperation spreads throughout the academic philosophical world; but their ideological power has weakened enough to allow us to see the real philosophical divisions that run through it more perspicuously.

The deepest and most decisive of these is the line dividing naturalistic from non-naturalistic views of agency, intentionality, reason, and normativity. Of course, this dividing line runs through the whole culture of modernity, and not just through philosophy. Philosophy merely articulates this division, providing us with one of the most salient expressions of it.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, it is highly unlikely that “strictly philosophical” arguments (or empirical evidence) will ever determine which side is right, or which view, ultimately, “triumphs.” That outcome will be determined by the kind of society we choose to become, the kind of future we want for ourselves, the kind of being we think a human being should be.

A second dividing line, almost as decisive, but not as extensive or deep since it runs only through philosophy, intersects the line dividing naturalism from

non-naturalism. On one side of this second line is a philosophical orientation and self-image derived from the natural sciences; on the other a philosophical orientation and self-image derived from the humanities. If scientism threatens philosophy from too close an identification with the sciences, then syncretism threatens it from too close an identification with the humanities. In both cases, it is a loss of identity that is threatened, either through a process of assimilation or through a process of hybridization. Neither of these threats can be eliminated; they are part of the existential condition of philosophy. That condition defines philosophy as that form of intellectual inquiry which cannot settle the question of its own identity: its identity will always be a question for it.

What is gained by looking at the divisions in philosophy in this way? First of all, it provides a far more complex and telling picture of the tensions and divisions in philosophy. On which side of these divisions one stands says a lot more about one's philosophical identity and orientation than can be said by using "analytic" and "continental" as terms of self-description. Second, it allows for finer discrimination and classification of the various positions and movements in philosophy, at once more precise and more elastic. It allows for more heterogeneity, and makes visible unexpected alignments and points of difference, creating more capacious and distinctive standpoints from which to reconstruct the history of philosophy. Third, and most important, it helps us see with far greater clarity what is at stake in the ongoing struggle over what it is philosophy is about, what it should be doing, and what cultural role it should play.

The essays collected in this volume represent a distinctive tradition of philosophy that originates in, and continues to be informed by, German romanticism and German idealism. But it is broader and more heterogeneous than either of these, encompassing a wider range of concerns and positions, the nature of which makes it difficult to keep questions of political philosophy, aesthetics, ethics, language and epistemology from becoming entangled with one another. It is a strain of philosophy that is essentially non-naturalistic and that identifies closely with the arts and the humanities. I call it "philosophical romanticism." By "philosophical romanticism" I do not mean to name an explicit philosophical position or a particular historical period. What I am referring to shows up, in whole or in part, in the work of various thinkers, historical and contemporary, some of whom would not wish to be associated with anything called "romanticism."<sup>2</sup> This is understandable, given what romanticism has come to stand for. Unfortunately, it is too often simply taken for granted that "romanticism" reduces to an anti-rationalist aestheticism; that it promotes communitarian anti-individualism; that it involves exaggerated, highly inflated conceptions of difference and particularity; and, that it is informed by impulses, and that it espouses ideals, incompatible with democratic forms of life.<sup>3</sup>

I think of the essays collected here as enacting a re-inheritance of romanticism, which re-inheritance, to borrow a metaphor of Goethe's discussed in Albert Borgmann's chapter, requires a growing backwards towards the past that is inherited. Thus, I want to think of contemporary philosophical romanticism

as not simply continuing in various ways and with varying degrees of awareness the philosophical projects of German romanticism and German idealism, but as reaching back to them, reclaiming and renaming a living romanticism for our time, and for a time that will follow our own.

A skeptical reader – and I expect that there will be more than a few – might justifiably ask: “So if it is not anything like what it is commonly assumed to be, then what is ‘philosophical romanticism?’ And why is there a need to make a big deal about it now? Surely, the academic world has an overabundance of philosophical “isms” of various kinds. Adding unnecessarily to the ever-growing and ever-more fragmented number of philosophical specializations and sub-specializations would not be wise. It is already too hard to keep up with all the stuff already out there. If this is going to be more than just one more well-marketed product looking for its own little niche in the academic marketplace, shouldn’t it have to prove that it is really worthy of our attention, that it is something that lets us see things in a new way, and so represents a real alternative to what is already available?”

I think the essays in this volume will easily answer the second question (“why now?”), each in their own way. As for the first question, I can begin to answer it by briefly outlining the defining concerns and preoccupations of philosophical romanticism:

(1) Most obviously, philosophical romanticism is a critical response to the Enlightenment interpretation of modernity, not just by making that interpretation problematic, but also by making modernity itself a central, if not *the* central, philosophical problem of the age. This means looking at “philosophical” problems as both responding to the problems of modernity and as implicated in them – as responding to and implicated in living modernity’s form of life. Under what conditions, and in what form, can the modern ideals of autonomy, reason, critique, and expressive subjectivity be lived successfully – lived, that is, without reproducing the standard list of self-defeating consequences (e.g. fragmentation, anomie, the leveling of meaning, loss of freedom, self-crippling forms of skepticism, etc.)?

(2) In so far as it understands itself as responding to the conditions of modernity, philosophical romanticism takes the question of what philosophy is or what it should be as a question defined and shaped by those very conditions. So the metaphilosophical question of what philosophy is or should be is inseparable from what it means to be modern, from the question of what constitutes philosophy’s own modernity. In being responsive to the conditions of modernity, philosophy is seeking to make sense of the conditions of its own possibility. To make sense of those conditions is to make sense of its own calling, and so the obligation to make sense of its own time is internal to the possibility of philosophy.

(3) As a protean form of life, open to abrupt, incessant and apparently uncontrollable processes of change, modernity is also a very disorienting form of life. The more responsive philosophy is to the conditions of its own modernity, the more unsettled its identity will be. The more unsettled its identity, the more

pressing the question of the *form* in and through which philosophy should express itself. Questions about the nature, sources and limits of its expressivity, of how it can “speak” in a voice of its own, become another one of its central preoccupations. The preoccupation (some might say, obsession) with the problem of its own expressivity draws philosophical romanticism ever closer to the humanities, sharing one of its own defining concerns with those of modern art and literature.

(4) To identify with the humanities rather than with the sciences means to become concerned with the fate of the humanities, with the fate of the “human” as such, particularly now that “the whole humanistic enterprise of trying to understand ourselves” is in danger of becoming “unnecessary and archaic, something that is best preserved as part of the heritage industry.”<sup>4</sup> As it comes to recognize that philosophy’s fate is bound up with the fate of the culture to which it belongs, philosophical romanticism engages in a normative critique of culture that is continuous with a normative critique of philosophy.

(5) Once the search for a voice of its own is regarded as internal to the activity of philosophy, and once philosophy identifies principally with the humanities than with the sciences, it becomes both more difficult and less necessary to defend some pure form of philosophical argument as the proper (and only) “voice” of philosophy. So the line between “narrative” and “apodictic” forms of argument will be happily and necessarily blurred, allowing the emergence of non-standard and pluralistic forms of arguments. Transcendental, dialectical, hermeneutic, deconstructive, genealogical, and narrative forms of argument all take the form they do because what needs saying or showing can’t be said or shown any other way.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, the purpose of such arguments is to get us to see things in a different light, and that light can shine only when a new perspective is made available to us.

(6) Thus, for philosophical romanticism, the primary task of philosophy is to help enlarge the cultural conditions of intelligibility and possibility, and thereby open the horizon of the future. Since it is especially sensitive to the tendency of the life forms of modernity to become rigid and inflexible, to become unresponsive to the need for new ways of thinking and acting, philosophical romanticism thinks philosophy can play a role, albeit a necessarily modest role, in facilitating normative and cultural change. In this sense, to “romanticize” the world, is to make room for the new, to make room for new possibilities.

(7) The emphasis on the new might make philosophical romanticism indistinguishable from artistic modernism, but that impression gets altered once we see the normative primacy that philosophical romanticism assigns to receptivity. The new is not something we will, something we can make happen; it is something that we “let” happen. As Stanley Cavell, summarizing the view of philosophical romantics like Emerson and Heidegger, puts it, “what happens in the world . . . is always happening.”<sup>6</sup> Receptivity is essential to “making” the new possible – receptivity to the present, to the difference between today and yesterday, receptivity to as yet undisclosed possibilities.

(8) For philosophical romantics, thinking about receptivity in this way also invites a reconsideration of our inherited conceptions of agency. The more we emphasize the positive role of receptivity, the more we stress the embodied nature of human agency, and its historical and cultural dependencies, the less likely are we to make mistake mastery for agency. We will come to see agency as a matter of what we let ourselves be affected by rather than a matter of exercising control over what we encounter. This redirection of our inherited notions of agency from mastery to receptivity is what Emerson is up to when he inverts the usual Kantian image of agency as spontaneous activity by making spontaneous receptivity primary. "All I know is reception; I am and I have: but I do not get, and when I have fancied that I have gotten anything, I found I did not."<sup>7</sup>

(9) Contrary to a popular but erroneous view, philosophical romanticism does not take flight from the everyday into some extraordinary dimension; it seeks to reclaim the everyday as the site where the ordinary and extraordinary are at home together, where they animate one another. Philosophical romanticism has a special interest in the everyday, not just as it now is, but as it might one day be. Since the everyday is where all that has gone wrong with modernity is most deeply felt, and where its effects are most devastating, the everyday is where the recovery must begin.

(10) As with early romanticism, philosophical romanticism continues to be preoccupied with the problem of how to recover nature as a source of meaning and orientation. That romantic idea, more than any other perhaps, seems to be completely out of place in a disenchanted universe. Acutely aware that that we are inclined immediately to dismiss this "romantic" idea, Albert Borgmann writes in his contribution to this volume:

Yet it remains that no one has been able to answer the romantic complaint that there is more to the world than a mechanical universe and a mercenary world and that we cannot be fully human beings until the missing regions of reality have been recovered by an appropriate ontology and appropriated by vigorous practices.

Such a recovery would also require the redemption of the world of things with which we are daily in contact. As Cavell, commenting on Heidegger's essay "The Thing," writes:

rather than saying [as Kant did] that in order for there to be a world of objects of knowledge for us, a thing must satisfy the conditions . . . of human knowledge, Heidegger is saying that in order for us to recognize ourselves as mortals . . . we must satisfy the conditions of there being things of the world. . . . And this apparently means: The redemption of the things of the world is the redemption of human nature, and chiefly from its destructiveness of its own conditions of existence.<sup>8</sup>



(11) While all of these concerns help to individuate philosophical romanticism, there is one over-arching concern that distinguishes this “tradition” from all other traditions of modern philosophy, and that is the concern with realizing a form of *freedom* that conditions of modernity make possible and thwart at the same time. Reducible neither to negative or positive freedom, it is a non-individualistic form of freedom which aspires to a state in which one is able to recognize one’s words and actions as one’s own, as *spontaneously* originating from oneself. A lot hangs on how we understand “one’s own” and “spontaneously originating from oneself,” which is why so much of this philosophical tradition is equally preoccupied with the corresponding and complementary relations of dependence which would make it possible to recognize one’s words and actions as one’s own (relations of dependence to which the normative ideal of receptivity is closely tied). What kinds of social and political relationships, call them positive dependencies, allow one to recognize one’s words and actions as one’s own? Can we lead lives that are “self-determining” without being “self-alienating?”<sup>9</sup> But since this form of freedom must also be spontaneous, capable of initiating a self-determining new beginning, the need for which will be ineliminable, philosophical romanticism is just as much preoccupied with the question of what it means to begin anew. In what sense can a new beginning be an expression of freedom and agency? Since the freedom of new beginnings will always be in productive tension with the social relations, cultural practices, and political institutions from which we derive our identities and sense of ourselves as agents, the degree to which we are able to recognize our words and actions as our own will be provisional at best, and the forms of recognition upon which we rely permanently subject to new normative challenges.

### Overview

The chapters in this volume touch on all the outlined concerns in multiple, provocative ways. I have organized them into five thematic areas: (I) Beginning anew; (II) Self-determination and self-expression; (III) Art and irony; (IV) The living force of things; and (V) Returning to the everyday.

### *Beginning anew*

The chapters in this section by Stanley Cavell, Nikolas Kompridis, and David Kolb are all concerned with the problem of the new, of how to begin anew, and of how to make sense of a new beginning in relation to the past from which it departs. They are also concerned with the role philosophy ought to play in initiating a new beginning, and why philosophy might be enjoined to play such a role. Stanley Cavell’s “The Future of Possibility” was written in response to the “counter-romantic mood” of the times, a mood marked by a pervasive sense of social and cultural exhaustion. For Cavell, this counter-romantic mood provokes the romantic question of the availability of a human future, of

whether there can be new possibilities for us. What can human beings say or do to open up the future, to make it responsive to our unmet needs? What are we now saying and doing that prevents the future from opening up to us? What if “the step to the future is closed not through depletion but through fixation?” The worry Cavell expresses here is not that we have lost the power to imagine other possibilities for ourselves, but that we have become so fixated upon our current possibilities that we find unintelligible the possibility of other possibilities, the possibility of other futures.

As a philosophical romantic, Cavell believes that it is philosophy’s job to keep the future open – “philosophy as such is thinking for the future.” The question of the future of human possibility is also the question of “whether philosophy has a future.” That future has to be voiced, somehow, in some new way, making it approachable, responsive. It is philosophy’s “peculiar task,” claims Cavell, to “think anew,” from “a new stance,” “after thinking has come to a dead end, or, say, has become exhausted.” To think anew in this sense is to think in a *romantic* mood, and to do that is unavoidably to risk melancholy and depression, the classic romantic diseases, and, thereby, to risk “disexpressiveness,” the classic romantic fear, the fear that one will lose one’s voice or be forced to speak in a voice not one’s own. Why take that risk? What could philosophy possibly say, anyway? Maybe, it would be “peculiar” for anyone to take on such a task, but perhaps it would be most “peculiar” for philosophy to take it on. Yet, Cavell is convinced that part of philosophy’s peculiarity is that it must struggle for or over its own voice. To regard its peculiar task as giving voice to possibility is to see that task as continuous with philosophy’s search for voice, the voice with which to respond to its own time, with which it can respond as philosophy and at the same time open up its time to the future.

In “The Idea of a New Beginning: A Romantic Source of Normativity and Freedom,” I explore the complex and ambiguous normativity of the new, showing its internal relation to the modern idea of freedom as a self-determining beginning. The normativity in question is of a kind that cannot be converted into rule-governed or law-like form. Although Kant was the first to articulate the idea of freedom as the capacity to initiate a new beginning, he could not accept a form of normativity that could not be converted into rule-governed or law-like form so he ended up obscuring rather than elucidating its normativity. As Cavell points out in the previous chapter, our hesitation before the new is due to the fact that we are dealing with something that is both unfamiliar and uncontrollable; hence, we are reluctant to regard it as a source of (accountable) normativity. However, our relation to the new is constitutive of our modernity; modernity defines itself by its openness to the new, and by a relation to time, to the present, which makes attunement to the new obligatory. For us, it is not a question of *whether* to be open to the new; but of *how* to be open to it. And, as it turns out, a question of *what* we are open to when we are open to the new. I explore these questions (and their implications for philosophy’s relation to the new) in connection with Adorno’s critique of the new

and William Gibson's novel, *Pattern Recognition*. With help from the films *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *The Awful Truth*, I then turn to the question of what it means to begin anew, and how it is that we can begin anew without denying or distorting our relation to the past or to our past selves.

The question of how we can begin anew and “yet remain authentic to what we have been” is at the centre of David Kolb's own reflections on the problem of the new, “Authenticity with Teeth: Positing Process.” But how can we remain “authentic to what we have been” if by authenticity we do *not* mean remaining true to some “fixed patrimony?” If this is what we mean by authenticity, then any change affecting the content of that patrimony will be seen as external to it. Drawing first on Hegel, and then on Deleuze (an odd couple if there ever was one, but that's philosophical romanticism for you), Kolb redescribes authenticity as a certain kind of attunement or normative relation to the *process* of change. And that process is understood as a real possibility present in any social or normative formation.

We come to self-presence within systems of thought and practices of politics and culture that are already underway trying to accomplish their own explicit goals, but which are stages of processes that turn out to have fuller goals, though those goals are graspable within the current formation.

These formations are themselves “inclining toward change.” Change does not have to be imposed or dictated from outside. It is a “self-manifesting” process, “positing its own motions and moments.” These show up as “inadequacies” or “breakdowns” of some kind, pointing to some other way of continuing the practice, or some other way of going on. “The goal is to develop institutions that show in their operation the process that creates and sustains them.” If institutions can do that, opening up the process by which they themselves change in response to tensions and posited “moments” constitutive of the institutions they are, then we can say that this process is “authentic.”

### *Self-determination and self-expression*

In “Letting Oneself Be Determined: A Revised Concept of Self-Determination,” Martin Seel proposes to rethink and rehabilitate the “passive” or “receptive” aspect of self-determination – the part which consists in our *letting* ourselves be determined. Seel wants to show that there is agency in the letting, and that getting human agency right means recovering the “unity of doing and letting-be-done” (what Dewey called the unity of “doing and undergoing”). Surveying various construals of self-determination, those of Hume, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger, Seel argues that they all failed to recognize or to unify both aspects of self-determination. “To be able to determine (actively), we must be capable of letting ourselves be determined.” For example,

we let ourselves be determined in the future as a consequence of decisions we make or of projects we undertake. We also let ourselves be determined by what we let ourselves be open and receptive to – “by our positive and negative affinity to the circumstances of the world.” Taking his bearings from Harry Frankfurt, Seel claims that it is what we care about, what comes to matter for us, not the “conscious or reasoned choice of this or that goal which seems to us worth achieving” that determines what we do with our lives. “If we want to be self-determining, we must in the end let ourselves be determined.” This view of self-determination comes very close to David Kolb’s Hegelian rendering of authenticity as involving a certain kind of attunement, a being-true-to, the process of self-determination, or self-change.

To *let* oneself be determined as one lets oneself be *determined* – this is the most propitious position. We can thus speak of successful self-determination only insofar as we grant the subjects of these determinations the capacity to enter into the relations in which they are already embedded in their own way.

In their chapters, both Richard Eldridge and Robert Pippin extend and test the possibilities of leading a life that aspires to independent self-determination and self-expression but under inescapable conditions of dependence. In “Romantic Subjectivity in Goethe and Wittgenstein,” Eldridge asks the question of what it is to be a human subject, and looks at how romantic literature and philosophy have often responded to this question by figuring the ordinary and the extraordinary, the beautiful and the sublime, and conventionality and originality as irreconcilably opposed.

Either nature in the aspect of the sublime conspires with inwardness to resist the sways of ordinary life and conventionality, thus setting up the image of the chthonic genius as the exemplar of moral achievement, as in Nietzsche, or nature in the aspect of the beautiful conspires with ordinary life and conventionality, thus setting up an image of pastoralized domesticity as the exemplar of moral achievement, as in certain moments in Rousseau. Each image then stands in immediate criticism of the other, and no stable image of moral achievement persists.

What is interesting to note is that both the rapprochement with the everyday and militant opposition to it can be, and have been, viewed as quintessentially romantic. Both “wild excess” and “pastoralized domesticity” represent romantic moral images. Eldridge puts it this way: “In the grip of such a desire, impossibly seeking original selfhood both against the grain of all conventionality and yet blended with social identity, no one knows what to do.” Can these images be reconciled? Can one achieve “autonomous selfhood and continuing sociality?” A look at Goethe’s *Werther*, the quintessentially tragic romantic hero, shows

how the aspiration to reconcile them can fail completely. A look at Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, which Eldridge approaches as an equally romantic text, shows that even if this aspiration cannot be fully satisfied, it can be lived in non-destructive and surprisingly satisfying ways.

Robert Pippin's "On 'Becoming Who One Is' (and Failing): Proust's Problematic Selves" takes up the problem identified by Richard Eldridge and restates it as the problem of negotiating the complicated relations between dependence and social independence, a change of approach that also involves showing that not all dependencies are alike. This appears to be one of the lessons learned by the protagonist/narrator of Proust's famous novel, *Remembrance of Things Past*. And that lesson seems to be connected to another, that in seeking authentic self-determination and self-expression we can fail to achieve it:

being the subject of one's life, a subject who can lead a life rather than merely suffer what happens, who can recognize her own agency, the exercise of her subjectivity, in the deeds she produces, also means *being able to fail to be one*.

(Perhaps it is this acknowledgment of possible (and likely) failure that explains why Proust's novel does not end up as a "novel of horrible disillusionment" the way that Goethe's *Werther* does.) As Pippin shows, Proust has a much more relaxed, a much more positive view of passivity and receptivity, prepared to let our success as agents hinge on chance and on letting ourselves be determined. That leads to the counter-intuitive idea that agency should not be understood as mastery: "We can only become who we are when, in a way, we cease to be so 'in control.'" Since failure is internal to any attempt to become who one really is, one must continually contend with and make sense of the provisional and often ephemeral nature of what one has been. "In this context, the question of whether there can ever be any end to this provisionality, re-formulation and re-engagement is obviously a pressing one." But how does one "test" one's success or failure in becoming who one is? Can there be a reliable test? For Proust, as we know, that "test" must be conducted in the dimension of time. The problem of recovering "lost time," the problem of Proust's novel, becomes continuous with the problem of "establishing" or "verifying" that one has indeed become who one is – or, "who one 'really' was."

### *Art and irony*

One of the questions at issue in all of the chapters in this section, particularly in discussing the "claims of art" and of "aesthetic reason," is to what extent these claims contradict or confirm Hegel's assertion that "art has ceased to be the highest need of spirit." Put another way: Does the kind of reflection our encounter with art initiates have any "public" as opposed to merely "private" implications for how we live? Another question concerns the proper relation of philosophy to art. It seems

that art is able to express philosophical concerns or problems not accessible to or expressible by philosophy independently of art; and that there is something art can say about the kind of writing philosophy is or philosophy requires. Just how close can philosophy get to the concerns of art without losing its own identity? Can art do for philosophy what philosophy can't do for itself? Or can philosophy do for art what art can't do for itself? The history of philosophy's relation to art is not just of philosophy's so-called disenfranchisement of art; it is a long and complicated history of art making demands on philosophy that philosophy can't meet, and of philosophy making demands on art that art can't meet.

In "Poesy and the Arbitrariness of the Sign: Notes for a Critique of Jena Romanticism," J. M. Bernstein identifies romanticism as a complex response to "a profound crisis of reason" arising from the disenchantment and dematerializing of nature and the deworlding of freedom and subjectivity. That response explains why romanticism privileges "aesthetic reason."

If art works are going to be a response to the crisis, to project or insinuate or promise or exemplify a resolution, then they must suspend the dematerialization of nature and the delegitimation of its voice, and, simultaneously, reveal the possibility of human meaningfulness becoming incarnated, materially saturated and embodied. Hence the core of art's rationality potentiality relates to the role and status of artistic mediums.

To work in a medium is to work with

a material that is conceived of as a potential for sense-making in a manner that is material specific. Hence in art the medium is not a neutral vehicle for the expression of an otherwise immaterial meaning, but rather the very condition for sense-making.

These first two steps of Bernstein's argument lead to a third step in which the materiality and medium-dependence of art works allows the reconnection of reason to nature as a source of meaning and normativity:

Since art is that kind of sense-making that is medium dependent, and mediums are aspects of nature conceived of as potentials for sense making, then art, its reason, is minimally the reason of nature as a potential for sense-making at a certain time. . . . The idea of an artistic medium is perhaps the last idea of material nature as possessing potentialities for meaning.

However, these connections among art, reason and nature, are broken by Jena romanticism, argues Bernstein. He claims that Schlegel's view of literature as medium-independent (based on the doctrine of the arbitrariness of the

linguistic sign), leads to a view of the freedom of the imagination as materially unconstrained, which thereby severs the medium of art from its essential link to nature. It also leads to a kind of skepticism about meaning and a kind of hyper-reflexivity about works of art exemplified in the influential writings of Maurice Blanchot and Paul de Man, and ultimately to the metaphysically motivated substitution of “the fragile aesthetic object” with a “special” kind of philosophical knowing – “the knowing of non-knowledge.”

In more ways than one, Bernstein’s chapter revisits and updates Hegel’s critique of Schlegel and Fichtean romanticism. The chapter by Fred Rush, “Irony and Romantic Subjectivity,” offers a defense of romantic irony and subjectivity that tries to blunt the Hegel/Bernstein critique of romanticism by bringing out the essential Kantian modesty, pluralistic openness, and anti-foundationalism of Schlegel and Novalis. By stressing these features of Schlegel’s and Novalis’s thought, Rush is able to separate them from Fichte’s foundationalist views of subjectivity and philosophical reflection, and show that it is Kant, not Fichte, who is the philosophical source of Jena romanticism. Both Schlegel and Novalis thought of modern art as already philosophical, philosophical in a way that philosophy couldn’t be independently of art. This is particularly clear in Schlegel’s view of irony as the condition in which modern art exists as art – the condition of having to reflect on its own conditions of possibility. For a work of art to be in that condition requires that it be capable of taking two distinct but interlocking stances towards itself: affirmation of the work’s own perspective and at the same time reflective distance from the limitations of its perspective. As Rush puts it, “irony is the acknowledgement that works [of art] are ‘partial,’ in two senses of the word – one who shares the affirmation they contain is partial to them, and one recognizes they are but partial representations of the world.” Rush’s defense of Schlegel thus consists in showing, contra Hegel, that romantic irony does not collapse affirmation (or commitment) into distance. They are co-equals, and they make it a requirement of modern sensibility to see “experience as lying on a continuum between identification and distance that typifies irony, along with the commitment to constant self-criticism that it entails.”

In her chapter, “Novalis’s Other Way,” Jane Kneller also emphasizes the Kantian sources of philosophical romanticism, and along the way, Kant’s own romanticism. Like Rush, she points that those associated with Jena romanticism had a deep anti-metaphysical and anti-foundationalist orientation, which at the same time was deeply utopian, aiming at the transfiguration of the empirical world. It was an orientation that combined a Kantian respect for the limits of human knowledge with a faith in the capacity we human beings have to get “outside ourselves.” Through the exercise of that capacity, we gain access to a non-foundationalist, non-discursive form of knowledge. That access is made possible by art and poetry, not philosophy, and it is an access that is both concrete and highly mediated, reconnecting art to nature, and bridging the Kantian divide between freedom and nature.

It is the most arbitrary prejudice that it is denied to human beings to be able to be outside themselves, to have consciousness beyond the senses. Humans may at any moment be supersensible beings. Without this ability they could not be citizens of the world, they would be animals.

On Novalis's view art does for philosophy what philosophy cannot do for itself, opening up the range of philosophical reflection by opening up philosophy to a form of non-discursive knowledge that has the power to enlarge the field of experience, the logical space of possibility.

### *The living force of things*

The chapters by Frederic Beiser and Albert Borgmann offer quite different accounts of the romantic response to naturalism, and of the romantic idea that there can be a non-naturalistic understanding of nature that can serve as a source of meaning and orientation and that is somehow complementary to but distinct from the naturalistic understanding of nature as the realm of law. Beiser's chapter, "The Paradox of Romantic Metaphysics," goes against the grain of current *Romantikforschung*, inspired by the work of Dieter Henrich and Manfred Frank, the influence of which appears in the chapters by Fred Rush and Jane Kneller (as well as in the writings of Richard Eldridge, Charles Larmore, and others).<sup>10</sup> Beiser argues that Jena romanticism consists in the failed, and bound to fail, attempt to fuse Fichtean idealism and Spinozist realism – i.e. a non-naturalistic view of human freedom and a form of naturalism that places everything within nature as the realm of law. The problem with Fichtean idealism, as Hölderlin put it, was that it made the self everything and the world nothing.<sup>11</sup>

It was the need to explain the reality of the external world, to do justice to the sheer otherness of the non-ego, that eventually forced the romantics to abandon the one-sidedness of Fichte's idealism and to complement it with the "higher realism" of Spinoza.

And that required appeal to a concept of nature as an organic whole, the most important implication of which is that "there is no distinction of *kind*, but only one of *degree*, between the mental and physical." That lets us see, as Schelling put it, "nature as visible spirit" and "spirit as invisible nature." But this apparent reconciliation of nature and freedom is merely notional, hides the fact, argues Beiser, that the organic concept of nature logically requires the rejection of the Kantian/Fichtean conception of freedom as spontaneity: "Once the self finally grasps its identity with nature, it then regards determination by nature as another form of self-determination." Thus, for Beiser, romantic metaphysics failed to avoid the Spinozist trap also identified by Hölderlin, making the world everything and the self nothing.



In some ways, Albert Borgmann's chapter, "Broken Symmetries: The Romantic Search for a Moral Cosmology," can be read as one more romantic attempt to redeem the life of things silenced by the scientific and ethical disenchantment of the world. However, Borgmann is also interested in showing how it is possible to render complementary and interdependent the scientific conception of nature and the poetic or aesthetic conception of nature, which would make room for a "moral cosmology." Borgmann treats Schelling's philosophy of nature as an unsuccessful but promising attempt to combine Kantian lawfulness with Goethean presence. Already in his *Critique of Pure Reason* and in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, Kant expressed the worry that the mechanistic account of nature could not "capture the living force of things." But Kant could not bring himself "to give scientific standing to truly living forces." Goethe, on the other hand, was able as a novelist to capture the "force of contingency and presence." Borgmann's fascinating analysis of Goethe's *Elective Affinities* (that has its own affinities with Eldridge's analysis of Goethe's *Werther* and Pippin's analysis of Proust) sets up an account of how Schelling's critique of the mechanistic view of nature culminates in an attempt to "mark out a realm of agency and life" and thereby "recover the contours of a moral cosmology."<sup>12</sup>

The interdependent complement of a law of nature is the instance that constrains the law to yield the description and explanation of a state of affairs or an event. Newton's laws of motion merely outline a possible space. They describe an actual world when we insert the values of, e.g., the solar system in place of the variables for mass, acceleration, distance, etc. Among the greatest of instantiations are works of art. They are the most eminent complements to laws. They are instances of high contingency – unpredictable and unprocurable and, in that sense, free. So are the nuisances of life and the results of throwing dice. But these are part of the low contingency of everyday reality. Works of art rise above and lend orientation to the plains of normalcy.

Borgmann thus suggests a solution to Schelling's problem of how to bring together Kantian lawfulness with Goethean presence. Bringing them together conceptually is one thing; fostering the the cultural conditions of receptivity which would make room for the requisite moral cosmology another.

### *Returning the everyday*

The final chapters of the collection are also concerned with the presence of things in our lives, this time primarily from the perspective of how they come to presence in a technological world, as in the chapter by Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Spinosa, and, as in the chapter by Jeff Malpas, how philosophy comes into being in its

encounter with how things come to presence for us in the experience of “wonder.” In “Further Reflections on Heidegger, Technology, and the Everyday,” Dreyfus and Spinosa ask the question of how we can gain a free relation to things, and so continue the line of inquiry opened up by Borgmann. Taking up Heidegger’s reflections on technology, they argue that gaining a free relation to technology involves getting right what is most significant about human beings and the everyday things in our midst. They argue on behalf of Heidegger’s claim that what is most significant about human beings is not that they are knowers and doers, but that they are “world disclosers” – beings who are capable of opening up “coherent, distinct contexts or worlds in which we perceive, feel, act, and think.” The question of what it is to be human is particularly urgent in our historical epoch, the epoch dominated by what Heidegger calls “the technological understanding of being.” Heidegger understood that modern technology is completely different and new, but had to struggle with the problem of how to formulate what was new and different about it, and the danger it represents.

The real danger . . . is not the destruction of nature or culture nor a self-indulgent consumerism, but a new totalizing style of practices that would restrict our openness to people and things by driving out all other styles of practice that enable us to be receptive to reality. This threat is not a problem for which we must find a solution, but an ontological condition that requires a transformation of our understanding of being.

That transformation involves seeing that “our understanding of being” is not something over which we dispose or directly control: it is something we *receive*. It also involves the realization that everyday resistance to the modern technological style requires resisting its “tendency toward one unified world” that impedes “the gathering of local worlds.” Living that form of resistance requires learning to dwell in plural worlds, between which we need to move freely, openly. This romantic image of dwelling in plural worlds nicely captures the contemporary talk of living with multiplicity and difference without forgetting the need for gathering and sustaining local worlds.

There is no better way to close this volume on philosophical romanticism than with Jeff Malpas’s concentrated and provocative chapter, “Beginning in Wonder: Placing the Origin of Thinking.” It could have been titled less modestly, but just as appropriately, “The Origin of the Work of Philosophy.” From what impulse does philosophy originate? Is it curiosity or wonder? How is wonder distinct from curiosity? “But what then is wonder, such that it may be the origin of philosophy? And what is philosophy, if wonder is its origin?” To be in a state of wonder, the state out of which philosophy can be said to originate, is to be captured by something “that can enthrall and enrapture,” which makes it sound as though one has to be smitten by the things of the world in order to philosophize, and smitten in such a way as to experience the fusion and interplay of the ordinary in

the sudden *presencing* of things in a particular taste, a touch, a sound, a movement. What is at issue here is not only wonder at light and sight, but wonder as a response to the often sudden and striking *encounter* with things.

The kind of wonder out of which philosophy arises reveals our prior belonging to the world, our “being already *with* things, already given over to them and them to us.” Thus wonder brings into view something both ordinary and strange, trivial and illuminating, something Malpas calls the “event of intelligibility.” What implications does philosophy’s beginning in wonder have for how philosophy is supposed to understand its own activity?

Philosophy may thus begin in wonder, but inasmuch as the demand for explanation constitutes a demand for illumination and transparency, so it can also come to constitute a blindness to the interdependence between transparency and opacity, and so also a blindness to the prior belonging to the world that first drives the demand for explanation as such. In this respect, philosophy begins in wonder, but it often ends in alienation – alienation from self, from others, and from ordinary things, as well as the extraordinary. Such alienation is not just a matter of the experience of philosophical difficulty in understanding or explaining how there can be knowledge of the external world or of other minds or of one’s own “mental states,” but also of how philosophical activity can connect up with the fundamental and everyday experiences of human life, with the things that drive us, that affect us, that matter to us.

### Notes

- 1 It goes without saying that naturalism is hegemonic in philosophy and in the culture of modernity. Of course neither naturalism nor non-naturalism consist of homogeneous positions; there is considerable variety on both sides, and the closer one gets to the borderline, more subtle differences and more hedging, too.
- 2 For various reasons, “romanticism” is not capitalized in this text. Depending on the context in which it appears the term can refer to the historical period or genre of art, literature, and philosophy, to a specific philosophical tradition, as in the case of “philosophical romanticism”, or, more generally, to a philosophical ethos or attitude.
- 3 For an excellent detailed overview of various misconceptions about philosophical romanticism, see Richard Eldridge’s introduction to *The Persistence of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 1–30.
- 4 Bernard Williams, “Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline,” *The Threepenny Review*, Spring 2001.
- 5 For example, the kinds of arguments marshaled by Heidegger and later Wittgenstein.
- 6 Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome. The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) p. 20.
- 7 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays*, p. 261. For analysis and interpretation of this passage of Emerson’s, see Stanley Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America. Lectures after Emerson and Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque NM: Living Batch Press, 1989); and Nikolas

- Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory Between Past and Future* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2006).
- 8 Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary. Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) p. 66.
  - 9 Robert Pippin, "Hegel, Ethical Reasons, Kantian Rejoinders," in *Idealism as Modernism*, pp. 98–9. See also Richard Eldridge, *The Persistence of Romanticism*, pp. 20–1.
  - 10 See Dieter Henrich, *The Course of Remembrance and Other Essays on Hölderlin*, ed. Eckart Förster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), and Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004).
  - 11 Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke, Grosser Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, vol. 3, ed. Friedrich Beissner (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1945–85) p. 236.
  - 12 In contrast to Beiser's reading of Schelling, Borgmann emphasizes Schelling's insistence on the "freedom and contingency" in nature just as much as necessity and law. However, as Beiser would concur, Borgmann points out that in his Jena years

Schelling's comments on the natural sciences became more impatient and peremptory. A dialectical monism of mind and matter began to eclipse and cover up the dilemma Schelling had uncovered in the *World Soul*. Eventually, art (and later religion) took the place of nature as the great datum philosophy had to acknowledge and understand.